



AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

Testimony by Allie Phillips, J.D., Vice President of Public Policy
and Tracy Coppola, J.D., M.S.E.L., Legislative Analyst
for the American Humane Association
Before the Connecticut Select Committee on Children
HB 5041—Cross-Reporting of Child Abuse and Animal Cruelty

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

On behalf of American Humane, the nation's oldest non-profit organization dedicated to protecting children and animals from maltreatment, we thank Co-Chair Urban for introducing House Bill 5041 and for scheduling the bill for a February 23 Select Committee on Children hearing.

Laws that support front-line professionals' ability to share information about suspected cases of both child and animal maltreatment are critically needed. American Humane believes that identifying all maltreatment occurring in the home is essential to ensuring family safety, strengthening families, and building humane communities. Cross-reporting is an effective way of accomplishing this.

Links between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence have been recognized throughout history. Reports have shown there is a significant overlap between child and animal maltreatment within the home and that, in particular, the identification of animal abuse and neglect in a home may serve as a reliable red flag for the presence of child abuse, and vice versa.

Cross-reporting laws encourage parallel referrals between employees of child protection agencies and humane enforcement and animal care and control, with the assumption that homes with one type of maltreatment may also be at a higher risk for additional forms of victimization. These laws allow for early intervention, or intervention in homes that may not otherwise have been identified, in order to prevent further harm. Cross-reporting also results in combining resources, engaging more diverse stakeholders, and preserving family safety.

Children who witness animal maltreatment may be traumatized and may be at additional risk for committing acts of animal abuse themselves. There may be situations in which pets may be targeted in order to ensure silence and compliance from children.

Moreover, when humane enforcement and animal care and control are the first-line responders into a home, they have a unique opportunity to observe an entire family for potential abuse or neglect. Rather than behind closed doors, animal maltreatment can occur in a family's yard where neighbors are more likely to see and report their concerns. Encouraging and educating humane enforcement and animal care and control to cross-report child maltreatment that they

suspect or observe will allow child protective services to respond more rapidly to a family in crisis.

Several states have enacted statutory language either mandating or permitting such reports without fear of violating confidentiality provisions. In addition, all states have laws that protect child abuse reporters from legal liability as long as reports are made in good faith. Cross reporting laws create ease and reporting amongst professionals.

American Humane recommends that, in considering passage of HB 5041, the Select Committee on Children should consider how to effectively bring law enforcement, animal care and control, and child protection agencies together to develop inter-agency relationships and collaboration. Specifically, we recommend consideration of the following:

- Requirement for humane enforcement and animal care and control and child protection agencies to enter a Memorandum of Understanding or similar agreement on cross-reporting;
- A provision requiring the agencies to cross-train on child and animal maltreatment and establish an agency policy;
- Enabling language encouraging humane enforcement, animal care and control and child protection agencies to make reasonable and appropriate reports of suspected child or animal maltreatment;
- Reports should be timely and consistent with any agency policy or state statute; and
- Civil and criminal immunity for anyone reporting in good faith.

Thank you, Chair Urban, for once again being a champion of human and animal welfare. Please let us know how else American Humane can be of assistance in cross-reporting efforts. American Humane is also a member of The National Link Coalition (www.nationallinkcoalition.org). Please consider the Coalition as an additional resource for these efforts as well as for Connecticut agencies desiring to connect with other Link communities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Allie Phillips, J.D.
Vice President of Public Policy

Tracy Coppola, J.D., M.S.E.L.
Legislative Analyst

Office of Public Policy
206 North Washington Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 836-7387 fax (703) 549-5437
www.americanhumane.org